

KHAKI SOLDIERS
AND OTHER POEMS
FOR CHILDREN

BY
MURIEL KENNY

CAMBRIDGE
W. HEFFER & SONS LTD.
1915

SIXPENCE NET.



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KHAKI SOLDIERS

WHERE'ER you go in England,
In country or in town,
You see the khaki soldiers
Go marching up and down.

No matter if the sun shine,
If clouds drop rain or snow,
You hear the khaki soldiers
Still singing as they go.

The King's son from the palace,
The squire's son from the hall,
The plough-boy from the cottage,
Are khaki soldiers all.

There's khaki digging trenches,
And khaki taking cover,
There's khaki shooting targets
And charging one another:

There's khaki cooking dinners,
And khaki mending clothes,
Where each man for his country
Just does the thing he knows:

There's khaki building bridges,
And mounting guard all night,
There's khaki flashing signals
To khaki out of sight:

And all around the Empire,
Where'er our colours wave,
Each land has khaki soldiers
As busy and as brave.

They heard one call to duty.
They took one cause in hand,
Like brothers men in khaki
Serve all one Mother-land.

So when the khaki soldiers
March singing down the street,
Salute in them your country
And in your heart repeat:

“There go the men would gaily
Their lives for England give—
God keep our khaki soldiers
For England’s sake to live.”

DEAR river, flowing day by day
Down from the busy town to me,
Go, carry with you on your way
My message to the ships at sea.

Flow on past all the level land,
The long green fields, the village towers,
The homely farms on either hand,
The kind-eyed cattle deep in flowers :

Till comes an hour you catch from far
The salt and sounding of the tide,
And reach beyond the harbour bar
Waters that as the world are wide.

There seek the great grey ships that keep
For England steadfast watch and ward,
And give them in the lonely deep
My message from the homes they guard.

Tell them for us the lengthening year
Spreads each new day some sweet surprise—
We grieve that changing seasons bear
To them but empty seas and skies.

Tell them we safely sleep at night
Because no rest their labour knows,
And bless them that till morning light
Not once their watching eyes will close:

That busy men by forge and desk,
Who drive the pen, who ply the tool,
And mothers at each household task,
And boys and girls at play, at school,

Still pause with thoughts and thanks to pay
For faithful service those who roam
And fight our battles far away
That we may dwell in peace at home.

III.

HORSES

HORSES that we loved to ride,
Horses that we drove with pride,
Horses from the farmer's plough,
All are gone for soldiers now.

You who plied with van and dray,
One dull weary round all day,
Plodding still through storm and sun—
Now you gallop with a gun.

Nought for shot and shell you care,
Din of battle, smoke and flare;
Limbs so stout and hearts so true,
No man better serves than you.

England, whom you love as we,
Kept through you still green and free,
Keeps for you when war is done,
Happy fields of shade and sun.

Shall our childish hands no less,
Offering carrot and caress,
Sway your spirits than before,
Hero-horses, home from war?

IV. THE KNITTING GAME

KNITTING stitches—let's pretend:
 Soldiers in a trench are mine;
I'll be in command and send
 Fighting orders down the line.

“Boys, we'll storm the trench ahead!”
 Leaps the first to meet the foe;
Now the next where he has led—
 Click! and crack! the rifles go.

Watch them moving, man by man,
 Pressing home the stout attack;
Foes may face their charge who can—
 Fie! a coward! haul him back.

Forward ever, no retreat,
 Trench by trench the field is won,
Inches slowly grow to feet,
 Feet to yards before we've done.

Soldier, who my scarf will wear,
 Treat it, please, with honour due:
Gallant men who guard you there
 Won their battles—so must you.

TROOPS IN TOWN

THE lucky houses down our way
Have all got soldiers come to stay,
In ones and twos, in threes and fours,
The number chalked beside the doors.

And when the doors are open wide
You see their khaki coats inside,
And children of the house perhaps
Are trying on the khaki caps.

From army-waggons bread and meat
And all the things that soldiers eat
Each day the khaki driver drops—
How much more nice than food from shops!

Then when the men come back from drill
I loiter by and look my fill,
When all the small bare rooms are bright
With cheerful smiles and fire-light.

Sometimes a merry group at tea
Hands round the news from land and sea,
Sometimes a lonely soldier bends
Over a letter to his friends.

At night, when I've been long in bed,
The men tramp home with martial tread:
"Good-night" rings out the bugle call,
"Good-morning" when it wakes us all.

VI. A VISIT TO THE HOSPITAL

THE hospital is big and clean,
All filled with sun and air;
Two rows of beds—you walk between—
Our wounded men lie there.

I sat beside my hero-man
And talked about the wars:
I said “Please show me, if you can,
Your honourable scars.”

He said, “This day a week ago
I fell beside my gun;
How long I lay I hardly know,
I knew the fight was won.

I came by ship, I came by train :
Find England looks the same;
And if I never fight again,
At least I played the game.”

I thought him very brave and kind
To fight for England thus;
“For if,” I said, “you’d stayed behind,
You’d still be strong like us.”

He told me things worth fighting for
Are worth the cost. “You see,”
He said, “If I’d not gone to war,
War might have come to me.”

VII. RED, WHITE AND BLUE

I'VE planted all my garden with red and
white and blue:
I'll not have any colours that are not England's
too.

Forget-me-not I set there, and Love-lies-bleeding,
flowers
To do our soldiers honour who give their lives
for ours.

I brought from English meadows big daisies
white as foam,
Like those beside the trenches that make men
think of home.

In Church on Sunday mornings the colours
hang in sight
We keep for our battalion which marched away
to fight.

On week-days, as on Sundays, I have my
colours too,
Where England's earth is growing her red and
white and blue.

WHEN Father worked in courts of law,
An ordinary man,
I never thought one day to draw
His sword, as now I can.

I never thought that friends quite near,
And boys I knew by sight,
Who went away to school last year,
Would this year go to fight.

I never thought the gardener's son,
And men in shops I knew,
And postmen—our own special one—
Would all be soldiers too.

I never thought our town, so far
From coast and cliff and quay,
Could send back many a jolly tar
To serve the King at sea.

O dare I think the war will bide
Until I too have grown
To carry, clanking as I stride,
A sword like Father's own?

CHILDREN, the school that was built for your learning,

Built by the Borough, unlooked by the Mayor,
Soldiers have seized, and forbid your returning;
Mute hangs the bell now, the bugle rings there.

Rolled in their rugs, where you laboured they slumber,

Cook over camp-fires, and picnic outside,
Drill where you drilled, while you watch without number,
Hang on the railings and gaze open-eyed.

Adam and Eve back at Paradise entry
Peeped past the angel and longed with your looks:

Who could have thought we should see a real sentry—
Bayonet—rifle—keep you from your books?

THE BELGIAN CHILD

I MET a Belgian child at tea,
I wondered what to say:
I asked him, "Will you play with me?"
He answered, "S'il vous plait."

If that's the way the Belgians talk,
It's better than I knew:
I shan't have very hard to work
Before I talk it too.

GRASSES GREEN

BY field and lawn, O grasses green,
By city park and square,
Your cool sweet grace, your dainty sheen,
Once made our world more fair.

Where men through weary months have trod
In close-knit ranks each day,
Where horse and gun have crushed the sod,
Your meek lives slipped away.

O grasses green, your beauty glad
Nor sun nor showers renew—
You too have given the mite you had,
What England asked of you.

XII. WOUNDED SOLDIERS

WE meet them in the public way,
Mid thoughtless folk at work or play :
They watch where others arm for war—
The men who went and came once more.

They went, a light in every eye,
Their limbs well knit, their purpose high :
Wounded and weak, bowed low with pain,
These are the men who came again.

On those far fields they played their part,
Bore stern in fight a gentle heart,
Met death and danger eye to eye,
And smiling heard the call to die.

Now one goes maimed and one goes scarred,
Here broken youth, there manhood marred,
One walks unseeing, one must stay
On other's steps his piteous way.

These were our sword and these our shield,
By wounds they bear was England healed :
Prisoners of pain their lot to be,
But by their bondage we go free.

We meet them, strangers and alone,
Their lives unguessed, their names unknown :
Silent salute our spirit sends—
Who if not these have proved them friends ?

XIII. TELL ME WHY

“TELL me why this year of sorrow
Wears so fair a face?
Whence earth’s scenes and seasons borrow
More appealing grace?”
“We who watch have hearts made tender,
Sense more keen to scan
All that Duty bids surrender
When she calls to man.”

“Tell me why is England dearer
In this world at war?”
“Grief and loss but bind her nearer
Who was ours before.
Finer things than we had eye for
Stir beneath the strife,
And the land that heroes die for
Wakes to nobler life.”

DEAR child, by England called to share
Her loss, her pain, her pride,
The best you know you give for her—
For her your father died.

That step, that longed-for voice you miss
Beside the nursery door;
The clasp, the whispered word, the kiss,
Peace can make yours no more.

Not ere the nursery door you close
And once for aye go forth,
Will you discern the good you lose
Or know your father's worth.

Not till your hand re-lift the latch
To let your children through,
Will you the last full meaning catch
And yield your gift anew.

Then, wise to weigh the cause, the cost,
And how your father fell,
All England gained through all you lost,
You will but deem it well.

XV. LEARNING HISTORY

WHEN I am grown quite old and grey,
In fifty years and more,
“Grandfather,” boys and girls will say,
“Tell us about The War.”

So now I try to bear in mind
The things I hear and see,
For things that happen now, you'll find,
Will then be history.

I'll tell them of the friends I had
Who answered England's call,
I'll count them over, proud and glad,
I shall remember all.

I'll tell them how I learnt to knit
To help our fighting line,
Some soldier in a trench would sit
Wearing that scarf of mine.

I'll tell them of the busy camps
That turned our commons white;
How dark it was without the lamps
When we went out at night:

How half a mile of guns looked queer
In our dull, quiet street;
How, warm in bed, I waked to hear
The tramp of marching feet.

I wish I were a man and tall,
And marched to war to-day—
I'd like to tell that best of all
When I am old and grey.

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